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Mr. Thomas W. Ferns
U.S. Department of Energy, Richland Operations Office
P.O. Box 550, MSIN HO-12
Richland, WA 99352-0550

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Dear Mr. Ferns:

I am writing regarding the Draft Hanford Remedial Action Environmental Impact Statement.

As a resident of the state of Washington and a native of the Tri-Cities region, I believe that the Department of Energy has the opportunity at this time to protect a wonderful Washington ecosystem -- the best remaining shrub-steppe community that historically covered much of the eastern half of the state.

I know that there are many interests adding their voice to the question of what to do with the uncontaminated lands at the Hanford site, including environmental, mining, and agricultural interests. My opinion is that keeping the site as wild as possible would benefit the most people if both current and future generations are considered. Intact ecosystems provide many benefits and serve functions that are often transparent to us until they are lost. Agriculture and mining operations that are too close to preserves can compromise the integrity of the native habitat, for example due to changes in precipitation run-off and pollution.

Therefore, I am in support of the Preferred Alternative set forth by the Department but with some modifications.

1. I wonder whether the Preferred Alternative includes a large enough area of wild lands south of the Columbia to ensure the viability of natural communities and to adequately protect the ecosystem from mining/agricultural impacts. I would prefer to see no commercial mining or agriculture (including livestock grazing) permitted on the entire site under consideration.

2. I support the modifications suggested by The Nature Conservancy, including the following:

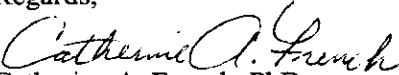
a. The Arid Lands Ecology Reserve, the McGee Ranch, the entire Wahluke Slope, the Hanford Reach, and the Columbia River islands should be managed as a permanent National Wildlife Refuge. This would ensure that a continuous zone of habitat lands surrounding the central portion of Hanford were protected.

b. It would be best if the Department issued separate decisions for the areas mentioned above in order to expedite a final decision on management of uncontaminated lands at Hanford.

Although the shrub-steppe ecosystem surrounding Hanford is perhaps more subtle than some of Washington State's other wild places, rest assured that it is valued by residents of the state. With so little of this habitat left, it would be great to see the Department preserve it.

Thanks very much for considering my input.

Regards,


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Managing Editor
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Journal of the National Association of Environmental Professionals

NOTE: This letter contains my personal opinion on this topic and is not meant to represent the stance of *Environmental Practice* or the National Association of Environmental Professionals.